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Wildcard's performance at Honolua Bay WCT event has surf world talking

BY NICOLE GRODESKY

CALIFORNIA'S PHENOM

Courtney Conlogue has it. Potential is one thing, but production is another, and Conlogue, 14 years old, proved she has what it takes to produce on the WCT stage. With an encouraging performance at Honolua Bay this past year, Conlogue is being touted as the next big phenom to come out of the California surf scene. Though currently focused on fulfilling her class requirements at a college preparatory high school, Conlogue's sights remain fixed on training to make the jump from the NSSA to the WCT.

Conlogue's story begins in Santa Anna, about 30 minutes from the beach. Not exactly the breeding ground for professional surfing. Luckily her dad, a dedicated surfer, took Conlogue surfing with him on weekends.

"I was always surfing twice a week on the weekends from sun up to sun down. Now, I've been able to experience surfing from waking up at 4:30 in the morning, getting in the water about five o'clock and then surfing 'till seven. Then I'll hit up a McDonalds, get a little biscuit (chuckling) and then head to school. So, now [I surf] three to four times a week.

Conlogue learned how to surf when she was only four years old on a surf trip down to Mexico with her family.

"I was just on a boogie board and saw my dad out there. He was surfing and having fun while I was on the inside looking at sting rays below me, just freaking out, telling my brother 'You better not touch the bottom; you'll get whipped by one of those sting tails.' (Laughing) I really wanted to go out there and learn.

"I asked my dad to push me into a few waves. So he pushed me into a few with my sister and my brother and we took turns. Once we got home we went to the San Clemente Rip Curl outlet, the old one. We went into the boardroom and I saw this board. It was a Rawson, 5'4". I really liked it. It had green on the outside and red on the center. I just liked the airbrush and really wanted the board. So,

my dad ended up getting it. It ended up being only about \$100 and Pat Gudauskas' old board. I was pretty stoked about that. I still have that board."

Conlogue's parents, brother and sister have the supportive family gig wired, and are one of the primary reasons Conlogue has enjoyed such success. Her father, probably the most hands on with Conlogue's career, helps her with board design, traveling, and cross training.

Conlogue is definitely one to watch.

Her recent performance at Honolua Bay has had the surf community buzzing.

"I went out to Maui a week before the contest to train with my dad. He helped me out a lot. I talked to the locals and asked them questions like where landmarks were and where the secret spot to sit was. I wanted to be able to learn a little faster possibly. I trained with my dad and I was confident when I went two weeks later. I heard that there would be a possible good swell coming in, and my dad prepared me by helping me out. I felt confident without him there so my mom went," Conlogue said.

The pressure mounting prior to the contest could easily have been paralyzing to any normal 14-year-old. Conlogue is anything but. She was to compete with all the top female surfers in the world whom, only a couple years before, she idolized. And, touted as the next young gun from California, everyone, the pros and the pundits, were watching to see what she was capable of against the sport's best.

"I just remember looking at the waves from the look-out spot and I remember the waves

just wrapping all the way around. It was getting close to the other point, so I knew it was big. I had my 6'2", went out, caught one wave and ate crap because I didn't have enough paddle power. So, I went in and got my 6'5". I'd never ridden my 6'5" before in my life, but I trust Bushman.

"I dropped into this massive wave and I couldn't see anything because of the wind. I was thinking to myself, 'Oh my god, what did I put myself in.' I saw this huge massive wall like 20-feet ahead of me. I was pumping down the line so fast while still getting all the water out of my eyes. I went for this barrel; the thing was just massive, like three feet over my head. I put my hands up to try and touch the ceiling; it was so high I couldn't reach it. Then I came out and then at the last minute a

little lip just came out of no where. I don't know where that thing came from, but hit me on my back and my head, ruining all that glory. Then I went over the falls with that wave. I was stoked; I had never seen a wave

that huge. You could just hear it. It was sucking you up and had so much chop because it was like victory at sea out there," Conlogue said.

Refusing to crack under the pressure, Conlogue embraced the experience and had the time of her life.

"I was the board catty for Bevo [Claire Bevilacqua] so I was in the water the whole time watching these girls drop in holding their rails while pulling in and getting barreled. You could see it from the Jet Ski area. Everyone would say, 'Is she coming out? Is she coming out?' And then boom, they would come out. I got so fried. I have so much more respect for those girls. Seeing them live is so much different than seeing it on a computer. When you're in the water, feeling it [the wave] lifting you over in the channel, you feel all the current sucking up next to the cave and then watch it barrel. It's so beautiful. Everything about that trip was gnarly," Conlogue said.

Conlogue has more stamps in her passport than any 14-year-old should. The girl has traveled all over the world and she's only a freshman in high school. She plans to stay focused on her education and go to the University of San Diego to study marine biology.

"I want to get a degree in Marine Biology and travel around the world getting water samples while I'm on the 'CT or 'QS," she said, chuckling.

For now, the surfing world will have to wait for the re-emergence of a California champion, but the public's had its taste, and will most surely be watching to see if the girl with all that potential can actually make good on it.